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ABSTRACT

This report discusses a study that examined state technical assistance (TA) infrastructures that support research-based practices for improved outcomes for students with disabilities served under Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. The 10 participating states included: Alabama, Colorado, Iowa, Maryland, Montana, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Texas, and Wisconsin. Results from the study indicate the semantics of defining technical and professional development has resulted in a variety of descriptions across the 10 states. The study also revealed four consistent themes regarding factors necessary for providing effective state-level TA. These factors are equally important and dependent on collaborative efforts among federal, state, and local stakeholders. Factors include: (1) a dissemination mechanism must be in place to integrate TA into daily practice in local schools; (2) qualified educators, related service providers, and administrators must be on the front lines in order for TA to be used effectively; (3) ongoing relationships must be nurtured with key individuals to promote collaboration between the education system and other agencies/organizations; and (4) evaluation of TA activities must focus on the impact of the TA initiatives. Appendices include definitions and the survey. (CR)

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State Technical Assistance Initiatives for IDEA Part B Programs

by

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November 2001

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IDEAs that Work

U.S. Office of Special Education Programs

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Scope of Work

All states provide technical assistance (TA) to local education agencies (LEAs) to support the implementation of Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA); however, there is limited information available on a national level as to how state TA is provided and the nature of the TA. To begin to fill this information void, Project FORUM at the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) examined state TA infrastructures that support research-based practices for improved outcomes for students with disabilities served under Part B of the IDEA. This examination was part of Project FORUM's work on its Cooperative Agreement with the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP). The primary purpose of this study was to explore:

- how SEAs shape and respond to local/regional education programs via TA;
- the format/structure of state-level TA; and
- the management and evaluation of TA strategies employed by SEAs.

Definitions of TA and professional development (PD) were developed to help focus the examination and distinguish between state-level initiatives that build capacity for implementing Part B programs in local school programs and traditional staff development activities (e.g., conferences and workshops). Definitions of TA and PD can be found in Appendix A. A summary of these definitions is as follows:

- **Technical assistance** includes those activities that provide extensive information and assistance to educational personnel to *facilitate the adoption and/or application* of research or practice-based products, policies or knowledge in order to improve the education of students receiving special education/related services.
- **Professional development** includes systematic initiatives (i.e., preparing and delivering adult education, formal and informal learning experiences, and other planned educational events) to *increase the competence* of all personnel in state education agency (SEA) and local education agency (LEA) programs to educate students receiving special education/related services.

State Selection and Interview Process

Ten states were selected to represent diversity in terms of geographical size and location, award of a State Improvement Grant (SIG), population size, and TA structures. The participating states include: Alabama, Colorado, Iowa, Maryland, Montana, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Texas and Wisconsin.

Each of the 10 state directors of special education was contacted by the Director of Project FORUM and invited to participate in the study. Materials describing the project

and interview questions were sent via e-mail and the postal service. Suggestions for the most appropriate people to interview were also solicited from the state directors. Interviews were scheduled and conducted during February and March 2001. (See Appendix B, *Interviewees by State.*)

The interview protocol (see Appendix C, *TA Interview Protocol)* was developed using information from four sources: (1) selected publications on TA to state and local education programs; (2) extensive discussion with persons knowledgeable about TA to special education and early intervention programs; (3) a protocol utilized by the National Early Childhood Technical Assistance System (NEC*TAS) for a similar activity reviewing state TA initiatives for children served under Section 619 and Part C and; (4) reports on TA programs contracted by the U.S. Department of Education (see references on page 19). The protocol included 13 questions with probes to elicit comments pertaining to the purpose of the study. The questions, minus the probes, were e-mailed to each interviewee prior to the scheduled interview. The charts in questions 11 and 12 were completed and returned to the interviewer to be used for discussion during the interview.

Findings

Defining Technical Assistance and Professional Development

The 10 participating states have not adopted formal definitions of TA, with two exceptions. Iowa has a definition of TA to guide the allocation of funds and assistance for its early childhood programs[1] and is working with NEC*TAS to define generic TA activities. Montana has a TA definition for special education that SEA staff is currently revising. All interviewees shared their perspectives on TA *in relation* to PD initiatives in their state. The following three characteristics of TA reflect descriptive comments from all interviewees about state-level TA initiatives.

- TA is an ***individualized activity***, either at a personal or district level. It is tailored to a specific individual or group and varies from answering a simple request for information to nurturing ongoing relationships with key personnel in local districts.

- TA is provided ***in response to a particular request*** for information/support or a need that arises out of state monitoring for local education programs. Effective TA acknowledges and responds to the client's initial request as promptly as possible.

- TA focuses on ***problem solving, collaboration and support*** to improve performance, either of individual students or school districts. Several states referred to the purpose

[1] Iowa's definition: Technical assistance is an ongoing, systematic and interactive process that is designed to achieve results and that enables knowledge from research, policy and best practice to be shared in partnership through a variety of strategies with specific groups, agencies, communities and other partners to use within their unique contexts.

of TA as building capacity of local districts to develop more effective school programs by enhancing the leadership, analytical and communication skills of all school personnel.

In contrast, interviewees described professional development as planned, statewide or regional events designed to provide content in a specific area related to improving student achievement and staff competencies. These events are often planned months, even several years before they are delivered. The traditional format is a workshop, inservice or conference, making it cost-effective to train large groups.

While all states identified a natural overlap between TA and PD activities, interviewees had very different viewpoints regarding the *nature* of this relationship. (See Table 1 below for further detail.) Understanding the variety of meanings interviewees ascribed to these terms was essential to exploring how states support local schools in implementing IDEA Part B programs. Interviewees described the relationship between their TA system and PD initiatives in the following four ways:

- Technical assistance and professional development are separate, but closely related endeavors. (5 states)

  Example: In Colorado, after classroom teachers participate in professional development programs on how to create opportunities for inclusive learning, staff from the Department of Education provides on-site support. Work groups composed of successful teachers also help participants implement the training in their schools.

- Technical assistance and professional development are the same. (2 states)

  Examples: State TA providers in South Carolina support state curriculum standards by providing regional training sessions on the standards as well as IDEA implementation. According to the Montana interviewee, both TA and PD focus on supporting school districts; however, TA is likely to be more short term and individualized (e.g., helping a district with a specific issue related to due process or IEP facilitation).

- Professional development is part of technical assistance. (2 states)

  Example: The primary purpose of Iowa's TA system is to promote the effective implementation of IDEA '97 by demonstrating how to integrate Part B practices with school improvement for general and special education students. Thus, PD is one type of TA devoted to assisting educational personnel in learning specific practices that will ensure achievement for all students.

- Technical assistance is part of professional development. (1 state)

Example: The Rhode Island SEA staff views its professional development system as providing the broad umbrella for technical assistance initiatives that focus on policy development, interagency collaboration and problem solving with local districts.

Table 1
Summary of State Perspectives on Technical Assistance (TA) and Professional Development (PD)

State	Description of TA	Description of PD
MT PD = TA	Specialized assistance to improve student performance; short term, focused on problem solving for student	Long term, embedded initiatives related to supporting school districts
SC PD = TA	Response to meeting local needs identified in monitoring; individualized to school district/region of state	State-wide events planned in advance, based on priorities
WI PD/TA	TA enhances collaboration for school improvement	PD supports mission of Department of Pubic Instruction- access to K-12 public education for all students
IA PD/TA	"Everything is TA;" TA meets the needs of clients via information dissemination, problem solving, guidance for emerging practices, content consultation	PD is on-going, long-term systemic change for individuals and organizations
CO Separate, but linked	"Everything is TA;" response to requests for specific information from the field; goal of TA is to build local capacity	Planned and controlled events, part of state improvement; responds to identified areas of need
OK Separate, but linked	Response to any type of request for information	Ongoing, sustained system of training
TX Separate, but linked	Providing ongoing support systems and an information network	Support and training for all staff who educate students with disabilities
AL Separate, but linked	On-site, telephone, and written assistance to teachers and schools to develop materials and address issues	Inservice opportunities
MD Separate, but linked	Capacity building to LEA or specific school, including problem solving and monitoring for continuous improvement/results	Ongoing development of skills, attitudes and knowledge with follow-up and support via TA
RI TA/PD	Interagency collaboration and problem solving, policy development and analysis	Each educator has an individualized professional development plan (IPLAN) linked to school improvement plans and improved student performance

Purpose of TA Initiatives

There was noteworthy agreement among the 10 participating states regarding the overall purpose and frequency of their TA activities[2]. The primary purposes for TA initiatives are described below.

- *Conveying/interpreting information regarding federal program requirements and relevant policies and directives:*

  All states reported that they frequently focus on ensuring that public policies (e.g., the 1997 amendments to IDEA) are implemented appropriately and effectively. This includes providing both leadership and information/support to local districts. Several interviewees noted that state special education monitoring of local implementation provides a means for identifying and delivering TA support to local schools. Self-assessment, record review and on-site visits focus the TA efforts.

- *Analyzing issues and diagnosing/troubleshooting problems:*

  Nine of 10 states indicated that analysis and problem solving is a primary TA function that they engage in frequently, and overlaps with identifying, selecting, and designing solutions/approaches (discussed below) when addressing student-related problems such as how to evaluate and serve a child with a specific disability. States find that some issues are ongoing from year to year (e.g., discipline or facilitating the individualized education program [IEP] process) and some are more focused on regional or current events (e.g., home schooling for children with special needs, extended school year for children with autism).

- *Working with stakeholders and related groups/agencies:*

  Nine of 10 states indicated this as a primary TA function. Interviewees described an essential TA role as responding to stakeholder requests for information, training and support, as well as enhancing the collaborative skills of their clients who work with other stakeholders involved in educating children and youth. For example, the Rhode Island Department of Education considers collaborative problem solving to be a primary TA function and works with the Office of Rehabilitation on transition services for secondary students in local school districts across the state. Interviewees stressed the importance of building relationships with key clients and interacting with them at frequent intervals on the telephone, email, on-site and at meetings and conferences.

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[2] This categorization of the purpose of TA was compiled from interviewees' responses to Question 10, a chart denoting the focus and frequency of TA activities (see Appendix C). Interviewees completed the chart and returned to the consultant prior to the scheduled interview.

States identified four groups as primary clients: families, general/special education teachers, local directors of special education programs, and school administrators. (Selecting and supporting clients is discussed further below.) Some states specifically focus resources to meet the unique needs of families whose children receive special education/related services. For example, the Wisconsin Statewide Parent-Educator Initiative focuses on developing the capacity of districts to involve families in Part B services through a state-wide network for parent-to-parent support/training and partnering with cooperative education service agencies and other private and public organizations. Iowa utilizes a consumer relations consultant who provides information to parents about their rights and the IEP process.

In several states, the process of facilitating collaboration among educational stakeholders and other interagency partners is linked to school improvement. In Iowa, state law requires that every school file an annual report to the legislature detailing its plan for school improvement. Any TA or PD initiative from the Iowa Department of Education must be linked to a school's improvement plan and describe how the initiative will increase student achievement. All special education monitoring in Iowa is linked to the local school accreditation process, ensuring integrated curriculum planning with general education.

The following purposes focus on providing support, resources, and information on specific topics or issues, and were selected somewhat less frequently than the above three purposes. Seven states engage in these activities "frequently" and three "sometimes".

- *Identifying, selecting, and designing solutions/approaches:*

  TA initiatives to achieve this purpose focus on assisting individuals or school districts in adopting or adapting specific innovations or practices. A major activity in this category is providing information and support about specific disabilities (e.g., autism or hearing impairments) and specialized interventions to address those disabilities (e.g., behavior management or cochlear implants). A related activity is installing or implementing computerized and web-related products and programs.[3]

- *Resolving conflicts and counseling/moral support:*

  State TA providers frequently receive requests from families and school districts to respond to issues arising out of the dispute resolution process. For example, Montana has initiated an "early assistance" TA program to diffuse potentially

[3] Although utilizing technology as a means to disseminate information/training and communicate with clients is used frequently by seven of the states interviewed, interviewees reported that they do not have the manpower or technical know-how to implement the newer technologies (e.g., video teleconferencing) as frequently as they would like.

adversarial due process situations. A former teacher, employed in the legal department of the Montana State Department of Education, conducts conflict resolution with school district administrators or families. In addition, part-time, seasonal employees who reside all over the state may facilitate an IEP meeting as part of the conflict resolution process.

The interviewees generally agreed that in their states they only *sometimes or rarely* help clients design program evaluations or assist them with grant applications and securing funding. A typical comment about the lack of focus on helping clients with program evaluation was that states have not had adequate knowledge and resources to track the impact of their technical assistance activities on student performance and are only beginning to address this area.

Organization of State TA Initiatives

Staffing

The states share three commonalties regarding their staffing patterns and responsibilities. (See Appendix D for details regarding TA staffing patterns within each state.) First, all interviewees reported that state special education staff divide their time among TA, PD, and other administrative duties. In some states, all SEA staff members also share monitoring responsibilities. No state has staff dedicated only to TA. Second, while most states assign staff to cover specific areas, either by disability area or specialty topic (e.g., Medicaid, preschool, discipline), all staff must be able to address the basic IDEA provisions.

Third, all states subcontract with IHEs, private organizations/individuals or other state agencies to cover needs and requests from local districts. Typically, this ranges from inviting national experts to providing short-term training events to hiring facilitators to address specific local issues. Long-term contracts of more than a year are also utilized. For example, Oklahoma contracts with four different organizations, including an IHE, professional development centers in local schools, and a local school district to provide regional TA services. Montana contracts with the University of Montana's Rural Institute to provide TA on low incidence disabilities. Maryland contracts with consultants as well as retired general and special educators/administrators to provide TA on research-supported instructional practices and issues related to the disproportionate representation of culturally and linguistically diverse students in special education.

Structure

Regionalization is the primary structure for supporting state TA initiatives. This organizational structure is utilized by nine of the ten states. One of the ten states, South Carolina, provides TA for Part B services to local education agencies (LEAs) exclusively through a central education office. Interviewees stressed that a centralized model works best for staff in small states that do not have to cover large distances in order to provide

on-site TA. Rhode Island uses a centralized model in addition to regionalization via a unique TA project based at Rhode Island College. Discussions are being held with the college, home to the University Affiliated Program for Developmental Disabilities, to possibly create an umbrella structure for combined TA and PD initiatives throughout the state.

The nine states that have a regional model for Part B TA to LEAs use two approaches, described below.

- *TA for Part B services is provided to LEAs primarily from a central education office with regional liaisons responsible for specified areas of the state. (AL, MD, MT, CO, OK, RI[4])*

Regional liaisons are provided through the department of education or via subcontract. Department of education staff may cover specific areas of the state (e.g., AL is divided into 10 regions, MD has 5, CO has 8, and RI has 4). Subcontracts may be with local schools or other institutions. Oklahoma has subcontracts in four regions to provide on-site TA—a continuing education program at an IHE, and two professional development centers in local schools and a school district. Montana utilizes part-time, seasonal employees who reside throughout the state to complement the expertise of state office staff with their specialized knowledge and skills (e.g., educating children with behavior disorders).

The model of regionalized services provided by a strong central office is very helpful for assisting state staff in developing and supporting relationships with particular individuals in specific regions over a period of time. Interviewees report that they develop knowledge of local issues, the communication style of key administrators and teachers, and student achievement that is essential to problem solving and conflict resolution. Also, contact with key clients can be scheduled on an ongoing basis, such as a monthly special education directors meeting.

Several interviewees noted that when the administrative structures or regions for delivering TA to special education within a state are different than those for general education, efforts to ensure that special education students participate in the general curriculum are much more cumbersome and can significantly limit collaboration between special and general education.

- *TA is provided to LEAs through an established regional system for Part B and general education services with monitoring, oversight and some specialized TA from a central education office. (IA, WI, TX)*

[4] Rhode Island utilizes two structures, regional liaisons as well as centralized services provided through a state funded TA project at Rhode Island College.

For example, in Texas 20 education service centers (ESCs) provide technical assistance, training and support to general and special education personnel throughout the state. Each ESC develops and administers an ongoing region-wide needs assessment process, including the consideration of emerging state needs, to determine regional priorities and define their technical assistance plan. Services to LEAs may be organized differently (e.g., special/general education or elementary/middle/high school) so that not all ESCs have a separate division for special education. However, each ESC has staff with expertise in special education issues and must provide IDEA Part B special education leadership, PD related to students with disabilities in integrated settings, and preschool special education leadership. Different ESCs also provide state-wide leadership for special projects/topics (e.g., Texas autism conference, CSPD Council, assistive technology, and low incidence disabilities). The SEA funds these initiatives and an advisor in the state office monitors how the ESC fulfills their responsibilities for special projects/topics as well as how local school district needs are met.

One of the obvious advantages of this model is that a team approach to education is in place, creating many opportunities for collaboration among special and general educators. This facilitates including students with special needs in the general curriculum.

Selecting and Supporting Clients

Seven states reported that they typically provide TA to four primary client groups:

- Families
- General education teachers
- Special education teachers
- Directors of local special education programs and other school administrators

Other client groups include local Head Start programs, institutions of higher education (IHEs), related service providers, and Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD) coordinators. Iowa and Wisconsin identified their primary TA clients as the regional education units that administer special and general education services for *all* children. In Texas, the Regional Education Service Centers (RESCs) provide TA (e.g., training and support), but the RESCs do not administer direct educational services to children.

States do not report any restrictions regarding who can contact them (especially via telephone or e-mail) to request assistance particularly since staff contact information is public knowledge, posted on the education department's web site or mailed annually to all LEAs. However, many interviewees described informal measures used in their states for deciding whom to work with and how. One strategy is to utilize local capacity first by referring an individual teacher or parent to the local special education director, other appropriate school administrator or other community resource. Some interviewees reported that they *must* inform the local director of special education (about calls from

families and teachers) or the state superintendent (about calls from local school superintendents).

Many interviewees indicated that one of the primary functions of an effective TA provider is to clarify the client's problem by coaching them through an analysis of how to resolve the issue and then identify resources to help them learn and implement suggested strategies. This involves prioritizing requests, especially phone calls and e-mails. Some states use a specialization system to handle content-specific calls (i.e., specific staff handle calls regarding autism or preschool), but all states require that TA providers have a firm understanding of the intent and implementation of IDEA (e.g., IEP process, parental rights, due process, testing accommodations, etc.).

On-site TA visits, in general, are conducted after some problem identification and negotiation about how to address the issue. For example, in response to a request about educating students in the least restrictive environment (LRE) from a school completing state monitoring in Rhode Island, discussion between the LEA and state TA providers resulted in the use of SEA funds to purchase resources and hire a facilitator. The facilitator was an administrator who had been successful in instituting LRE practices in his school. In Colorado, on-site TA to LEAs must be linked with goals identified in its state improvement plan.

Assessment of Client Needs

States use multiple approaches for identifying the TA needs of LEAs. The three primary approaches used by a majority of the 10 participating states include:

- OSEP and state/local monitoring (emphasizing self-assessment)

  For example, when a RESC is monitored by the Texas Education Agency (a two-week process management and service audit performed every five years), the special education component is also reviewed. Weaknesses identified through group and individual interviews with school educators and administrators, parents and other agencies provide a focus for TA by the RESC.

- State-level advisory councils

  For example, the Special Education Advisory Panel, CSPD Advisory Council, Council of Special Education Directors, or Early Access Coordinating Council for preschool programs may be used to identify TA needs.

- Input from local directors of special education and outcomes delineated in state education plans

  For example, State Improvement Plans or the annual CSPD plans may be used to identify TA needs.

Other sources of needs assessment information include issues raised by state TA providers in staff meetings and annual retreats, analysis of student achievement/accountability data, evaluations of professional development programs; surveys of LRE coordinators, input from regional education councils and coordinators, and tracking systems for state staff phone calls and on-site visits.

Delivery of TA

Interviewees reported using a variety of methods to deliver TA and interact with their clients and constituencies over the previous one-year period. These methods are described below.[5]

Methods utilized "frequently" by 9 or 10 states:

- Telephone contact/conferences (10 states)
- Providing/facilitating regional/topical workshops (10 states)
- Hosting/supporting statewide conferences (9 states)
- On-site visits (9 states)
- E-mail (9 states)

SEA staff from a central office or through a regional network provided on-site visits. State and regional conferences, which are considered traditional professional development strategies, are also popular ways of providing TA (i.e., information and support) to clients.

Methods utilized "frequently" by 6 or 7 states:

- Facilitating peer-to-peer exchange/consultation (7 states)
- Developing/disseminating print resources (6 states)
- Mini grants to support innovative practices (6 states)

States develop print resources because not everyone has web access. Some states send a print notice to clients announcing availability of print documents and send one copy to local directors. States also post the documents on their web sites in PDF format for downloading. Some states (e.g., Iowa, Maryland and Wisconsin) make active use of their web sites to post education resources and documents and update clients, as well as the general public, about Department of Education activities.

Methods utilized "sometimes" by states:

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[5] These categories were compiled from interviewees' responses to Question 11, a chart denoting how frequently various methods were utilized to deliver TA (see Appendix C). Interviewees completed the chart and returned to the consultant prior to the scheduled interview.

- Interactive video/audio teleconferencing (6 states)
- Developing videos/audiotapes (6 states)
- Maintaining a computer data base and/or web site (4 states)
- Providing Internet bulletin boards (4 states)
- Identification and use of model demonstration sites (4 states)
- Mentoring/coaching (4 states)

Six states sometimes use interactive video/audio teleconferencing.[6] The Iowa and South Carolina Departments of Education have just hired technology specialists in their special education divisions to help expand their ability to use video conferencing, develop computer databases and/or improve their web sites. Maryland and Alabama report success using small voluntary pilot projects in some LEAs to implement innovations, and spread the word about their success through principals and parents. Technical assistance is provided to LEAs that want to replicate these projects in their schools.

Methods utilized "rarely" by states:

- Web-based discussion forums/chatrooms (9 states)
- Developing/disseminating CD-ROMs (6 states)

Several states commented that CD-ROMs could quickly become outdated so that they prefer posting information on their web sites. Alabama staff reported that their State Improvement Grant will provide funds to set up an electronic bulletin board. Maryland's Department of Education has established a Special Education Leadership Forum (MSELF) Electronic Learning Community (ELC) that provides interactive opportunities for special education leaders across the state.

Coordinating and Managing State Technical Assistance Systems

All states utilize monthly or bi-weekly meetings of special education staff providing TA to Part B programs. Other TA management strategies include monthly meetings with related state-level divisions in the SEA, annual retreats, and internal e-mail and memorandum updates. Almost all states also have a master calendar of PD events available on their web sites, with regional postings in those systems with established regional networks.

Interviewees from six states described ongoing PD opportunities for TA staff related to their specialty areas as well as how to provide effective TA in general. Training topics include implementing IDEA, computer applications (e.g., Power Point, Excel), strategic planning, time management, organizational development, and results accountability. The Iowa Department of Education provided specialized training for state consultants that

[6] Three states with large rural populations (Iowa, Montana and Texas) use video conferencing frequently with clients, as well as in-person staff meetings.

focused on improved communication and interaction skills via coaching, consulting, facilitation and presentation. In the future, the Department plans to address the issue of using a fiber optic network for distance learning. In Iowa, an unintended positive result of training staff from four bureaus in the Division of Early Childhood, Elementary and Secondary Education simultaneously is an emerging shared identity and culture related to educating *all* children.

Evaluating Effectiveness

Documenting, Tracking and Assessing TA Activities

All states report that the OSEP self-assessment monitoring process, as well as the results of their state-local monitoring programs, provides a foundation for evaluating the effectiveness of state-level TA initiatives. In general, the self-assessment study reinforces communication and supports positive interaction between the SEA and LEAs. In particular, the identification of problem areas and strengths provides valuable needs assessment data for prioritizing future TA activities. Another strategy utilized by all states is the traditional participant evaluation of TA workshops and state conference sessions.

Few states have established a *comprehensive* system for evaluating and tracking their TA activities, although most are working on key elements. State examples of evaluation activities currently in place follow.

- Maryland and South Carolina track the number of TA documents and other resources they produce, as well as telephone calls. Both the SEAs have instituted a data-based tracking system for phone calls that includes the caller's name, contact information, group represented, issue, and type of TA offered.

- Montana tracks on-site TA visits and is initiating a more comprehensive tracking system. At the end of 2001, the Department will issue a report describing requests for TA, the TA provider, and purpose of the TA. Such a tracking system will allow future TA and PD initiatives to be planned more proactively.

- Alabama compiles a quarterly performance report that reflects TA visits to school districts, monitoring and grant writing. This report is submitted to the state superintendent and is incorporated into a report for the legislature. The Special Education Advisory Council in Alabama also receives an annual list of PD initiatives organized by the SEA.

- In 1999, Wisconsin surveyed special education directors and their Cooperative Education Service Agencies (CESAs) regarding their concerns in order to identify priority areas for TA and PD. The regional service networks within each CESA must also submit a five-year plan of operation with an annual progress report. Monitoring local districts has become part of Wisconsin's self-assessment plan for TA. Looking

for inadequate or inappropriate implementation of IDEA will help them build a concrete plan for improvement and unite short-term training events with long term TA priorities.

Performance Indicators for Instructional Improvement

All participating states report that while they are *beginning* the process of identifying strategies for linking TA with instructional improvement for all students via performance indicators, all acknowledge this is a critical area for further guidance and support from OSEP. States acknowledge this is an important evaluation issue, and none had concrete policies or practices in place for demonstrating the effect of their TA initiatives on student performance. Examples of how some states are planning to use student performance indicators to evaluate the effectiveness of TA/PD initiatives follow below.

- Colorado budgets TA/PD projects based on needs assessment data, pilot testing, and student performance. The next step is to expand traditional PD evaluations to look at how information presented at workshops and other training has been utilized to improve results for students. A two-pronged approach will be used. First, a cadre of interviewers trained to evaluate PD initiatives will use quantitative and qualitative methods to answer the question, "Did we teach our students differently and what is the level of use of these new practices?" Second, performance accountability measures, including outcomes for students and their families, will be required. Any PD project in Colorado will have to include pre- and post-testing and self-assessment of how participants are implementing new practices. A random sample of participants will be interviewed by one of the evaluators to ascertain whether the participants' professional development experience helps them incorporate new knowledge and skills in their daily teaching practices.[7]

- Rhode Island plans to use the evaluation of a current transition project as a model for assessing the impact of other TA and PD initiatives on student outcomes. The project tracks the numbers of students who are assessed and receive transition services with how many students find employment, the length of employment and the quality of the student's work performance.

- South Carolina has developed school-based performance indicators to assess the effectiveness of specific PD programs provided to classroom teachers (e.g., 90 percent of discipline problems will be handled in class; decreased referral to special education for behavior problems for students from minority groups). These student indicators could be reviewed to assess the effectiveness TA support following training.

- Iowa is starting to look at performance monitoring of IEPs, specifically at *how* IEP goals are linked (not just whether or not they are linked) to the general curriculum to

[7] Colorado plans to use an educational model, the Concerns-Based Adoption Model (Hall & Loucks, 1978), for tracking the concerns that individuals experience when changing their teaching practices, as well as the levels of use of the innovation.

provide qualitative data about student achievement. Results of this review could provide information critical to identifying how TA could enhance student achievement.

Two other related TA strategies for ensuring positive outcomes for all students reported by half the interviewees are: (1) facilitating the integration of good teaching practices and materials into all education programs, and (2) emphasizing research-based practices in all TA and PD initiatives. Iowa reviews how effective educational practices are utilized when they monitor Area Education Agencies during an on-site accreditation review every three years. In Oklahoma, pilot teachers are trained to evaluate student progress through portfolio assessment for alternate assessments. Educators are encouraged to share the observed student benefits with colleagues to encourage them to become more proficient with portfolio assessment.

Improving the Effectiveness of TA Initiatives

In order to ensure implementation of solutions and best practices from state or regional TA providers, interviewees stress the importance of *increasing educational leadership at the local level*, particularly from principals and directors of special education who need to see their roles as broader than managing compliance with IDEA. One of the most critical aspects of local capacity building is to assist key educational personnel to assume a broader role in integrating general and special education services. State TA providers utilize a variety of means to enhance this local leadership, such as promoting partnerships at State Improvement Grant (SIG) PD schools, facilitating local administrative support for mentoring (using successful teachers to provide on-site TA and PD directly in the classroom), and nurturing current and potential leaders through building relationships and exposing individuals to evidence-based practices and future trends in education, psychology and organizational change.

A frequently mentioned barrier to developing local capacity is the belief that the "one shot" TA or PD event, is the solution to addressing complex educational issues. The traditional annual workshop or conference as the primary means to deliver professional development is reported by interviewees to be still "going strong". They indicate that annual conferences and regional workshops are utilized to deliver TA as frequently as on-site visits and individual consultation via email and telephone.

Strategies to address other logistical barriers to building local capacity suggested by interviewees include:

- Recruit and retain qualified educational personnel. The impact of even the most efficient TA initiative is reduced when educators and administrators move out-of-state or leave the profession, necessitating retraining of new hires and increased time spent in establishing new relationships.

- Find and fund substitutes for release time for on-site meetings and planning between TA providers, administrators and educators. It is particularly difficult to find the time to analyze problems and follow-up on recommendations with clients who are also responsible for classroom teaching. Teachers and related service providers often have parent conferences, meetings with colleagues/specialists and other school duties during free periods and before and after school.

- Encourage educational personnel to seek TA and PD, and then involve them in implementing meaningful change. Not all educators and administrators embrace life-long learning as part of their professional responsibilities. Some view state-level TA as a form of supervision, and resent intrusion in their classroom or jurisdiction. While best practice in adult education stresses the importance of involving individual learners in crafting meaningful plans for continuing education, it is often more economical when funds are limited to plan one program for a large group.

- Ensure administrative and public support for TA. Several interviewees discussed the perception, particularly by public audiences, of TA and PD as unnecessary expenditures, even "boondoggles". While the public may have a basic understanding of the need for ongoing professional education for educators, administrators and related service providers, the need for technical assistance is less understood. Suggestions include involving more parents and community groups in TA activities, making presentations to the PTA and sharing success stories widely with general education administrators.

Conclusion and Suggestions for Next Steps

The semantics of defining technical assistance and professional development has resulted in a variety of descriptions across the 10 states that participated in this study. Facilitating a shared understanding of TA among states and OSEP would be an important step in assisting states to implement effective practices to ensure student achievement. Several interviewees commented that participating in the study clarified their perspectives and raised additional issues for consideration about their TA initiatives. States may be receptive to adding presentations, forums and roundtables to such communication networks as the annual CSPD conference or the OSEP Leadership Conference with the goal of reaching a shared understanding of the definition and practice of TA.

Interviewee comments generally reflect an understanding that effective TA is not a linear, top-down approach to disseminating knowledge and innovation; rather, it is a complex process of supporting local entities to build capacity and address systemic change goals and priorities for improving student performance. State visions for effective TA are not yet realized.

The study revealed four consistent themes regarding factors necessary for providing effective state-level TA. These factors are equally important and dependent on

collaborative efforts between federal, state and local stakeholders. In addition to the four factors described below, interviewees also noted that increased funding is always needed.

1. *A dissemination mechanism must be in place to integrate TA into daily practice in local schools.* On-going follow-up is crucial to ensuring that clients can implement new skills and knowledge in local education programs. Such follow-up should take many different forms, including telephone consultation, on-site support, connecting clients to other state and local resources, and nurturing collaboration among general and special education providers within a school district.

   States use technology (especially e-mail and web sites) frequently to provide TA. Interviewees requested assistance in developing distance education programs (especially video and audio teleconferencing) and using technology to develop databases for tracking and evaluating TA activities.

2. *Qualified educators, related service providers, and administrators must be on the front lines in order for TA to be used effectively.* State TA providers view their role as external consultants, mentors and trainers, not supervisors or "bosses". They do not feel it is their role to instill a desire for TA and continuing professional development. Interviewees also felt strongly that state-level TA could not substitute for basic teacher preparation, and many expressed a desire to increase collaboration with IHE programs to ensure that both special and general educators are prepared to implement IDEA.

3. *Ongoing relationships must be nurtured with key individuals to promote collaboration between the education system and other agencies/organizations.* It is critical to identify key administrators and educators in local and regional special and general education programs who can provide the leadership necessary to integrate special and general education programs. Collaborative efforts must link education personnel with families, business leaders, and IHEs, as well as other state agencies such as vocational education, rehabilitation, mental health and health.

4. *Evaluation of TA activities must focus on the impact of the TA initiatives.* Examining indicators of student performance as part of TA evaluation initiatives is just emerging in many states, and states could benefit from guidance and resources in this area. Data must be collected on both "inputs" and "outputs" of TA. Inputs focus on how, when and where the TA was delivered (e.g., number of state department of education staff responsible for TA or how many on-site visits were provided across all regions of the state). Outputs focus on the quantity and quality of change produced (e.g., number of clients trained or change in scores on performance testing).

   In addition, interviewees view both the OSEP self-assessment and their own monitoring of local education programs as important means for pinpointing state needs and evaluating their TA initiatives. Four states emphasized the overlap

between monitoring functions with TA and PD, adding to the need to clarify terms and functions among technical assistance, professional development and monitoring.

Finally, future studies that address the following questions would add valuable information to the field regarding technical assistance.

- What knowledge and experience are critical to success as a state TA provider, and what is the best way to obtain this background?
- How do state and local staff stability and turnover rates affect the impact TA?
- What is the most effective way to follow-up and support local leaders to reinforce implementation of recommendations made through TA?
- How should TA be adapted to different phases of the change process and what milestones for change should be identified?
- What is the most effective way to establish a network of individuals and schools to provide on-going support to one another following the initial TA?
- How can the state department of education support TA providers in their efforts to coordinate activities, share priorities, and establish indicators of success?

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Appendices

Definitions *

Technical assistance:

Providing extensive information and assistance to educational personnel to *facilitate adoption or application* of research-based or practice-based products, policies or knowledge in order to improve the education of students receiving special education/related services. Such assistance may include:

- Interpreting and reconciling relevant policies, laws/regulations, and directives
- Analyzing issues and diagnosing/ trouble shooting problems
- Identifying, selecting, and/or designing suitable solutions and approaches to problems/issues
- Designing program evaluations
- Working with stakeholders and other groups/agencies
- Securing funding and other resources
- Resolving conflicts
- Counseling/moral support
- Installing and implementing products, programs and technologies

Training/professional development:

Systematic initiatives such as preparing and delivering instruction, planned educational events, and formal and informal learning experiences to *increase the competence* of all personnel in SEA and LEA programs/agencies to educate students receiving special education/related services. Such initiatives include:

- Preparation of individuals as educators and related services practitioners;
- Mentoring and coaching individuals to acquire, process and integrate knowledge, research and best practices;
- Ensuring the continued competency of administrators, educators, paraprofessionals, related service providers and other school personnel.

* Adapted from: Hood & Hutchins, 1993. *Research-based development in education.*

Interviewees for Survey on State TA for Part B Programs

Alabama
Julia Causey, SIG Director, Special Education Services

Colorado
Lorrie Harkness, State Director of Special Education
Ann Pearce, Regional Liaison, Special Education Services Program

Iowa
Lana Michelson, Administrative Consultant, Bureau of Special Education
Norma Lynch, Consultant, Bureau of Special Education

Maryland
Carol Ann Baglin, Assistant State Superintendent, State Director of Special Education
Lucy Hession, Program Manager, Instructional Support and Staff Development Branch
Jerry White, Program Manager, Program Administration and Support Branch
Division of Special Education and Early Intervention Services

Montana
Susan Bailey-Anderson, CSPD Coordinator, Division of Special Education

Oklahoma
Margaret Bergant, CSPD and SIG Coordinator, Special Education Services

Rhode Island
Tom DiPaola, State Director of Special Education

South Carolina
Kathy Fender, Office of Curriculum and Standards
Gail Redford, Office of Exceptional Children
Lois Stephenson, Office of Exceptional Children

Texas
Kathy Clayton, Manger, Division of Special Education

Wisconsin
Patricia Boper, OT Consultant and Director, Wisconsin State-Wide Parent Initiative,
Steve Gilles, Consultant for Transition and CSPD Coordinator Division for Learning Support

Survey Questions:
State Technical Assistance for IDEA Part B Programs

1. **Do you have a definition for technical assistance and staff/professional development in your state**? If yes, please send.

2. **What relationship is there in your state between PD initiatives and your TA system?**

3. **What is the primary purpose(s) of your state TA system?**
Probes for interviewer: Provide information and resources on specific or topics or issues; assist in assuring that public policies are implemented appropriately and effectively; assist others in adopting or adapting specific innovations or practices

4. **Please describe your state TA structure.**

   Staffing
   Probes for interviewer: SEA, IHE, subcontract, other

   Centralization
   Probes for interviewer: Centralized (entire state served from one office); decentralized offices in regions

   Funding
   Probes for interviewer: Supported by SEA only; supported by multiple state agencies; IHE; school districts; SIG/SIP; other Part B funds; other

5. **Who are your primary clients/recipients of TA services?**

Client	Frequency of contact/month

6. **How do you decide with whom to provide TA?**
Probes for interviewer: No restrictions- any one can request assistance; clients must meet specific criteria (e.g., state mandate, willing to invest time, need, lack of resources, etc.)

7. **How are relationships established and maintained to meet the needs of clients dispersed throughout your state?**
Probes for interviewer: Meet regularly with a statewide advisory group; regional organization and assignment of generalists to staff particular regions/districts; hire

specialists to oversee specific issues in more than one region; provide TA staff with professional development relevant to their specialty work areas as well as generic TA knowledge; coordinate the planning and delivery of TA services among various state agencies/departments; develop performance indicators that reflect student outcomes vs. numbers of clients served, on-site visits made, etc.

8. **How are your TA systems coordinated and managed?**
   Probes for interviewer: How are needs assessed and priorities set? How is TA selected for clients? Is there a master calendar for all TA activities?

9. **How do you link information and TA with the broader vision of instructional improvement for all students?**
   Probes for interviewer: Facilitate the integration of good teaching practices and materials into all education programs; emphasize research-based practices; unite short-term information/training events with long term TA priorities; develop performance indicators for TA that reflects student achievement as well as personnel satisfaction with service; other (specify)

10. What is the focus and frequency of your TA activities?
(Check how frequently you provide the following)

Type of TA	Frequently	Sometimes	Rarely
Conveying/interpreting information re: federal program requirements and relevant policies/directives			
Analyzing issues and diagnosing/ trouble shooting problems			
Identifying, selecting, designing solutions/approaches			
Designing program evaluations			
Installing and implementing products, programs and technologies			
Assisting with grant applications and securing funding			
Resolving conflicts			
Working with stakeholders and related groups/agencies			
Counseling/moral support			
Other (*Describe*):			

11. What methods do you utilize to provide TA?
(Check how frequently you provide the following)

Methods	Frequently	Sometimes	Rarely
Statewide conferences			
Regional/topical workshops			
On site visit			
Telephone			
Developing videos/audiotapes			
Interactive video/audio teleconferencing			
Providing Internet: bulletin boards, listserv			
Developing/disseminating print resources			
Developing/disseminating CD-ROMs			
Web-based discussion forums, chatrooms			
Email			
Maintaining a computer data base and/or web site			
Identification and use of model demo sites			
Mini grants to support innovative practices			
Facilitating peer-peer exchange/consultation			
Mentoring/coaching			
Other (*Describe*):			

12. **Describe how you evaluate the effectiveness of your TA system.**
Probes for interviewer: Documentation (e.g., client surveys, TA reports that summarize achievements by performance indicators, expert reviews, external evaluations, electronic reporting, peer review); tracking (e.g., presentations, products developed, onsite consultations, repeated contact with clients, coordination with other TA providers)

    How are evaluation results used and by whom?

    Is TA evaluation included in the Part B school improvement plan?

    What would increase the effectiveness of your TA activities?

13. **Is there one person (group) that has direct oversight responsibility for all TA?**

Organization of State TA system

State	Staffing	Centralization/Regionalization
AL	22 FTE provide generalized TA with assigned responsibilities (e.g., due process, child count, budgets, and gifted); 10 FTE have specific regional responsibilities	Central office staff provide generalized TA and cover 10 special education regions.
IA	40 FTE consultants in the Bureau of Special Education in Des Moines; 5 FTE off-site with specific responsibilities (e.g., autism, TBI, parent advocacy, deaf)	Central office staff liaison with Area Education Agencies.
MD	6 FTE in the Program Administration and Support Branch of the Division of Special Education; 22 FTE and consultants and 8 part-time consultants provide TA in accordance with their expertise (e.g., monitoring for continuous improvement, compliance, data, learning disabilities, transition etc.)	Staff assigned to the Program Administration and Support Branch have responsibilities for five regions which includes 24 local school systems Staff can provide on-site TA as needed
MT	8 staff in the special education division, each with a specialty focus (e.g., preschool, transition, deaf-blind); 9 to 11 part-time salaried positions throughout state respond to district needs	Central office staff work with regional part-time staff
OK	23 IDEA Part B professional staff with statewide responsibilities for compliance, data, finance, CSPD/SIG, and transition grant	Central office staff serves entire state and works with districts; subcontracts for CSPD regional projects and other TA projects
RI	7-10 FTE (20-30 consultants) based at Rhode Island college; 10 staff at the Office of Special Needs with programmatic specialties such as early childhood, transition etc.	TA project at RI college focuses on serving the entire state with central office staff who also liaison with four education collaboratives to serve local schools; the goal is to have two or three staff connected to the network at each school

Organization of State TA System (con't)

State	Staffing	Centralization/Regionalization
CO	25 consultants/supervisors in Special Education Unit have a programmatic specialty (e.g., behavior, autism, literacy related to student needs)	Central office staff liaison with 8 Regional Assistance Centers for special education and support a part-time CSPD coordinator for each region
SC	15+ staff in Office of Exceptional Children have content specialties in areas of disability (e.g., LD, mental health)	Central office staff serves entire state
TX	TA for general and special education (and some early intervention) is provided by 20 regional Education Service Centers (ESCs). Additionally, some ESCs have state-wide leadership for functions and projects including but not limited to the Texas Autism Conference, some aspects of services for visual and deaf impairments, the CSPD leadership Council, parent coordination, LRE & inclusion, assistive technology, low incidence, behavior/discipline 21 staff in SEA provide leadership to the ESCs and the state	The regional system of ESCs functions as the TA arm of the SEA. SEA staff provide oversight and funding to ESCs, as well as produce resources, and monitor local districts.
WI	36 staff on the Special Education Team in the Division of Learning Support, Equity and Advocacy cover special areas (e.g., CSPD, transition, discipline); 12 Comprehensive Education Service Agencies (CESAs) provide the majority of TA to local districts via the Regional Service Network (RSN)	Central office staff liaison with RSN coordinators in each of 12 CESAs. (The RSN focuses on TA, special education communication and professional development for all school districts.) Each RSN has a coordinator and assistance, funded by the state department.

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